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JAB-O-METER

TAKE YOUR SHOT

Jan 7 **81,50,982 doses**

Jan 8 **79,68,523 doses**

TOTAL: 1,51,47,41,099

NATIONWIDE	JAN 7	JAN 8
Fresh cases	1,17,100	1,41,986
Recoveries	30,836	40,895
Deaths	302	285

KARNATAKA	JAN 7	JAN 8
Fresh cases	8,449	8,906
Recoveries	505	508
Deaths	4	4

EXPERT BODY LOOKS TO TAILOR VAX FOR OMICRON

The NTAGI panel is discussing the possibility of restructuring existing jabs to make them more potent against new variant

REDESIGN TO REDUCE TRANSMISSION RATES

Current jabs appear largely ineffective against preventing Omicron infection, though hospitalisations are lower now. "We want to push firms to redesign vaccines so that they are better suited against Omicron and to reduce transmission rates," said N K Arora, head of Covid Working Group of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI)

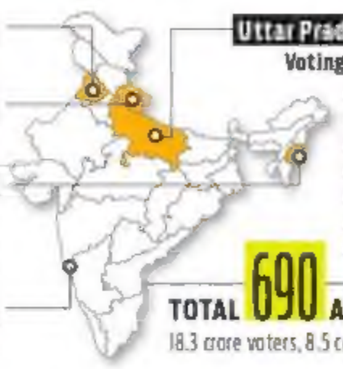
EFFICACY RESULTS NOT OUT YET

- Global firms such as Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna have conceded that even three vaccine doses may not be able to curb rapid spread of the highly transmissible variant
- No results available yet on efficacy of Covishield and Covaxin against Omicron, and on whether three doses will help | P8

COVAXIN

CAN BE EASILY SUBJECTED TO REDESIGN EXPERIMENT, NTAGI SOURCES SAID

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • THOOTHUKUDI • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI



Punjab: 117 seats
Single-phase voting on Feb 14

Uttarakhand: 70 seats
Single-phase voting on Feb 14

Manipur: 60 seats
Voting in two phases
- Feb 27 (38 seats)
- Mar 3 (22 seats)

Goa: 40 seats
Single-phase voting on Feb 14

Uttar Pradesh: 403 seats
Voting in seven phases
- Feb 10 (58 seats)
- Feb 14 (55 seats)
- Feb 20 (59 seats)
- Feb 23 (60 seats)
- Feb 27 (60 seats)
- Mar 3 (57 seats)
- Mar 7 (54 seats)

TOTAL 690 ASSEMBLY SEATS
18.3 crore voters, 8.5 crore of them women

Dos and don'ts
- Campaign curfew between 8 pm and 8 am
- No victory celebration allowed
- Not more than 5 people, including candidate, can do door-to-door campaigns
- Parties told to adopt virtual campaigning
- Online nomination option for candidates
- Polling time increased by 1 hour
- Covid booster dose must for poll officials

COUNTING DAY: MARCH 10

'CRIMINAL' CANDIDATES
Parties fielding candidates with pending criminal cases must upload their full details on their websites. Parties will also have to give a reason for selecting such candidates

SEVEN-PHASE POLLS FROM FEB 10

No rallies, public meetings in five poll-bound states till Jan 15; parties asked to do virtual campaigns; voting in UP spread across all 7 phases; CEC vows to make polls 'Covid-safe'

KUMAR VIKRAM @ New Delhi

ON a day when the country saw nearly 1.5 lakh fresh Covid-19 cases, the Election Commission announced the poll schedule for Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur but in a first-of-its-kind move, all physical rallies, road shows and public meetings have been banned till January 15 owing to the ongoing pandemic. The Commission on Saturday said it would review its decision as the "ground situation is dynamic". It also urged political parties and candidates to hold virtual rallies.

While the first phase of polling will begin on February 10, the last phase will be held on March 3 and the results will be declared on March 10. Uttar Pradesh will see seven-phase voting between February 10 and March 7. In Manipur, polling will be in two phases, while Punjab, Goa and Uttarakhand will have a single-phase election (see graphic).

Explaining the decision to go ahead with polls amid the spike in Covid cases, Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra said holding timely elections is the "essence of maintaining democratic governance". The CEC said the decision was taken after detailed discussions with the Union health secretary, home secretary, experts and health secretaries of the poll-bound states. He said the elections would focus on Covid safety measures to ensure maximum participation.

Chandra asserted that vaccination rates in the five states had improved significantly during the last week. The CEC also said it was incorrect to link polls with the rise in coronavirus cases, citing the examples of Maharashtra and Delhi, which recorded a high number of cases even when there were no elections.

So far, 53% of the eligible population has been fully vaccinated in UP but the level is lower at 44% in Manipur and Punjab. In Goa and Uttarakhand, the double vaccination level is high at 96% and 83% respectively.

The EC had faced flak during the West Bengal polls in April 2021 as Covid-19 numbers dramatically rose during the second wave. It banned road shows only in the last two phases of the elections. P7

> **Candidates should conduct their campaign through virtual mode as much as possible. There will be no *nukkad sabhas* (neighbourhood meetings) on public roads and no victory procession after counting**
>
> Sushil Chandra, Chief Election Commissioner

10 city wards behind state Covid surge

CHETANA BELAGERE @ Bengaluru

TEN wards have turned Bengaluru into an epicentre of Covid cases in the state over the last seven days.

With 83.5 per cent of active cases in the state, the city's positivity rate rose to 10.53 per cent on Saturday. Of the state's total of 38,507 active cases, the city has 32,157. To the 8,906 cases added in the state on Sunday, Bengaluru contributed 7,113.

Data from the state Covid-19 war room shows that Bellandur, Varthur, Begur, HSR Layout, Hagadur, Doddanekkundi, New Tippasandra, Koramangala, Horamavu and Shantala Nagar wards are reporting the highest number of cases in the city, triggering the surge.

The data showed that the city reported only 1,396 cases from December 25 to 31, but added a whopping 24,281 cases between January 1 and 7. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has demarcated the wards into six levels based on the total number of active cases. While Level 1 indicates 0-10 cases, Level 2 with 10-25 cases, Level 3 with 25 -50 cases, Level 4 with 50-100 cases, Level 5 with 100-300 cases and Level 6 with over 300 cases. P3

Mekedatu Yatra: Cong, govt head for showdown

DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI @ Kanakapura

THE Congress and government are headed for a confrontation with the opposition party going ahead with its big-ticket Mekedatu Yatra, starting from Sunday.

Sources said that the government is ready to tackle the yatra, which is being taken out from Mekedatu to Bengaluru, with a "judicious" use of force, ensuring that the law and order is maintained. "We will book those who violate the rules, including Covid norms and curfew regulations. The administration is prepared," said Ramanagara Deputy Commissioner Dr K Rakesh Kumar.

Echoing it, Superintendent of Police S Gireesh said the police will intervene depending on the situation. "Over 2,000 men will be deployed and, if required, more will be pushed in," he told *TNSE*.

The padayatra, being taken out to highlight the government's delay in executing the balancing reservoir project at Mekedatu along the Cauvery, may turn out to be a high-voltage drama in the Assembly segment represented by state Congress president DK Shivakumar.

CONTINUED ON: P4

SESSION LIKELY IN FEBRUARY

With curbs in place till January 19, the government may hold a joint Legislature session in the first week of February | P4

CELEBRATING LIFE OF PAST P2

EXPRES READ

Mahagathbandan on the cards in Goa?

Belagavi: A grand alliance of "like-minded" political parties, including the TMC and Congress, against the ruling BJP is taking shape in Goa ahead of the Assembly elections scheduled to be held on Valentine's Day in the coastal state. P7

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